Review

Juan Bautista Cabanilles (1644–1712): Organ Works. Anna Pikulska, Bartholomé Sánchez Organ, Cariñena, (Aragón). Musikproduktion Dabringhaus und Grimm, MDG 906 2367-6 (2025)

[13 tracks, playing time: 67:43 English & German booklet]
The various regional organ schools of the Iberian Peninsula have more elements that unite them than divide them, so that one can speak of a great Iberian organ tradition that interacts with other countries and continents. This rich tradition was shaped by important composers, starting with A. de Cabezón, through S. Aguilera de Heredia and F. Correa de Arauxo, to J. Elías, who is even more ignored by the (German) organ world than his presumed teacher from Valencia.

Juan Cabanilles had two professions that were interdependent: organist at Valencia Cathedral and priest. The vast number of his handwritten works can be seen as an indication of his active teaching career.

The booklet provides little concrete information about Cabanilles and his music. The resulting dissatisfaction of another reviewer should be briefly addressed here: J. van Veen (June, musicwebinternational.com) misses crucial information about the recorded pieces, which one would not want to do without when it comes to our composer and resident of the “terra ignorancia.” Van Veen takes it upon himself to fill in the gaps; some of his comments would have fit nicely in the booklet.

It is not entirely clear whether the CD is intended to be a portrait of the composer or a portrait of the organ. This raises the question: why the Bartholomé Sánchez organ (1734) with its conspicuously large collection of old pipes? Undoubtedly a fabulous instrument, but what do 800 Gothic pipes have to do with Cabanilles? There is probably no such thing as a typical Cabanilles organ – nor is there any need for one, because a large part of his keyboard pieces – contrapuntal tientos – can be performed admirably on a single-manual Renaissance organ.

Cabanilles' purchase of a spinet (1666) is a good indication of the organists' daily working and expressive medium; this *espineta* would probably have been the first choice for the dance repertoire (5 & 13). In addition, Francesc Villanueva Serrano (2011) documented the purchase of a small organ (portative). Twelve years later, Cabanilles acquired a house in the Valencian municipality of San Salvador, where many of his works were premiered. It is a nice idea to imagine Cabanilles composing for his cathedral organ.

The label's description speaks of a “representative cross-section of Cabanilles' organ works.” It omits the fact that he composed over 900 liturgical versi, probably half of his keyboard music.

And the encounter between Pikulska and Cabanilles? It was extremely harmonious.

Although Cabanilles structured the longer pieces in a contrasting manner, Pikulska uses the possibilities of the large historical organ for contrasting registrations – this is effective, audience-friendly and certainly a legitimate option.

In *Tiento de falsas de cuarto tono* (9), it remains unclear whether the dynamic fluctuations are a technical problem or whether the performer has succeeded particularly well in interacting with the breathing of the organ (rhythm of the bellows).

In the *Tocata de mano izquierda de quinto tono* (10), Pikulska also refrains from changing timbres. The extreme split sound brings to life the image of a passing marching band.

What the lips, tongue, and brain of a *minstrel* can muster in terms of virtuosity, Anna Pikulskas' fingers courageously attempt to surpass. Cabanilles pure – there are too few CDs like this. The silver disc should be played often.

Dr. Johannes B. Ring